

WINNER of the year's longest title: 'Depot — animal magician's hut: containing notes, documentation, and experiments of Peter Sebastian Graham in the materializing of the mythological art battery through exploration of the Australian puma' is an exhibition opening tomorrow at the Australian Centre For Contemporary Art in The Domain, South Yarra.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART - winning ticket No. 2515 drawn 28/11/90

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Arts, Reviews

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Ian W. Abdulla's sheep's head trilogy: social history from the banks of the Murray River.

MELBOURNE'S galleries end a spectacular year on an unusually vigorous note. Apart from the habitual pre-Christmas group shows, much provokes debate. For instance, how well do Peter Sebastian Graham and part-Afghan Aboriginal artist Ian W. Abdulla fit their respective stereotypes?

Comparisons are invidious, but interesting. Both artists are learning: Graham, 20, still at art-school; 43-year-old Abdulla starting to paint as recently as 1989. Each concentrates on a specific landscape location, be it the Murray River near Cobdogla where Abdulla grew up, or Central Victoria, haunt of the elusive "Victorian puma".

Abdulla's naive paintings are pure unadulterated magic, though they make no claim to be. Graham presents himself as a magician, but risks precocity.

Unlike most Aboriginal artists, Abdulla does not paint ancient Dreamtime myths. He struggles to capture specific memories of South Australia's riverine country before the great flood of 1956. The usual dot paintings are not for him; he's a social history painter.

Magic invention, magic intention

Galleries

Ian W. Abdulla: *Life of an Aboriginal Family on the Murray River During the Mid-Twentieth Century*

Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi until December 22.

Peter Sebastian Graham: *Depot — Animal Magician's Hut* ACCA until December 23.

Michael Downs: *Constructed Landscapes*

Tolarno Galleries until December 22.
Reviewed by Jenny Zimmer

What wonderful variety contemporary Aboriginal culture now offers.

We learn how the Abdulla family eked out a living collecting glass, picking grapes, and hunting rabbits, rats and frogs. They made meals of boiled sheep's heads, and skinned rats for pelts. The boys used sheep's

jawbones as toy pistols to play "crooks and cowboys".

Each painting is elaborated with an explanatory block of text, hand-lettered at centre top. Often they start: "This is how we would..." There's humour, pathos and enormous *joie de vivre* in Abdulla's carefully collected memories of childhood and youth.

PETER Sebastian Graham's impressive installation presents him as master-magician. Every mark he has made, every scrap he has found, is given ritual significance. He sees himself possessing powers of shaman, witchdoctor and scientist — at one with ancient animistic spirits and the boundless electrical energy of the universe.

Graham scribbles on scraps of paper and turns out multitudes of over-exposed photo-

graphic prints and lots of sticks, stones, bones and fur. His youthful wisdom is scrawled everywhere in sepia ink, smudged and stained, suggesting timeless antiquity.

Graham's installation is loosely conceived as a "depot" or storage unit in which to hold source data relating to the hunt of the Central Victorian puma. But his imagination is rampant. "I am," he writes, "the beast".

Graham is remarkably sensitive and inventive. In time, he might be thought a genius, but at this point his script falls far short of Leonardo da Vinci's or William Blake's — and he's not yet mastered Joseph Beuys' measured sense or restraint.

There is something very spectacular at Tolarno: five exciting constructed landscapes by visiting English artist Michael Downs.

Built of canvas and paper stretched, woven and ruched over wood, wire and pipes, they protrude up to 30cm from the wall. Their vivid colours and agitated forms pull the viewer into pictorial space by exerting a peculiar vertiginous power which is even more strongly felt at oblique angles.